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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

PERSIAN TILES.

THE History of Art in Persia dates from the remote ages of the "Four ancient monarchies," of which Persia is the only one now existing. The long duration of Persia as a separate and generally independent kingdom has been less owing

to its power of resisting attacks from without than to the faculty always shown of absorbing its temporary conquerors.

Thus the conquests of Alexander in ancient times, and those of Moguls, Arabs, and Affghans more recently, have each left Persia comparatively unchanged.

A large proportion of the inhabitants at the present day, especially in the north and north-west, are of Turkish (Turkistan) origin, and still preserve the language and to

some extent the features of their ancestors, while at the same time they are nationally as thoroughly Persian as the rest of the community. One great cause of this in more modern times is doubtless what may be called the sectarian nature of the national creed; the Shiah, as opposed to the Sunni, form of Mahomedanism. This sectarianism has no doubt had a great effect in keeping alive the feeling of nationality with which the country has always been impressed, and in preventing union with the native mussulman states.

A continuous national existence has probably favorably influenced the development of art among the people. Before the time of Alexander they had reached a degree of perfection in

238 attest the existence of a similar although degenerated art in the time of the Roman empire. Of the centuries immediately after the Arab conquest few specimens of Persian art now remain, owing to the works being executed in more perishable material than rock and marble. Among the oldest remains of this period are probably the ornamental tiles with which the domes and walls of the mosques were decorated. In these the influence of the new religion is naturally very manifest. These tiles appear to be an imitation of a peculiar kind of earthenware with a beautiful metallic lustre, which was made in Persia certainly 600, and possibly 2,000 years ago.

From the earliest time until the present day Persian art has retained a distinct characteristic style little influenced by contact with other nations. The only exceptions are the results of the importation of Chinese porcelain in the 16th and 17th centuries, and of Cashmereshawls about the same period, both which importations have continued to be closely imitated in Persia.

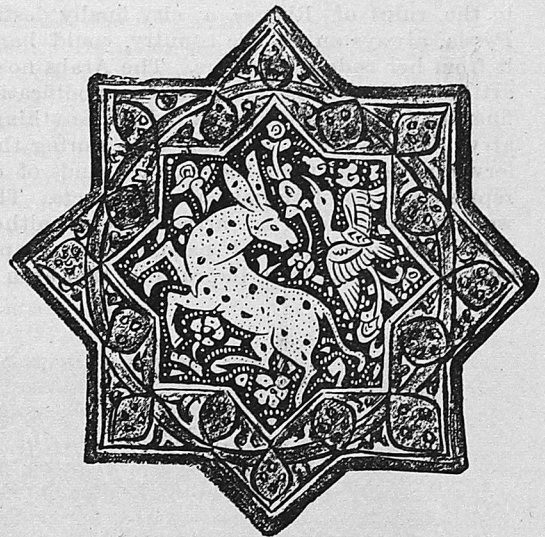
That the taste for art has long been widely spread among the Persians is shown by the great pains taken to ornament articles of daily use and of little intrinsic value. Nor has the taste by any means diminished, still less died out, in the country. Some of the textile fabrics of the present day compare not unfavorably with the most ancient specimens, as also some kinds of metal work. The earthenware on the other hand has greatly degenerated. The decay of this and of some other manufactures dates from the universal disturbance and anarchy which accompanied the overthrow of the Sefavean dynasty by the Affghans in the last century.

Persia is in all probability the country from which the Arabs derived the arts afterwards developed by them in Spain and elsewhere.

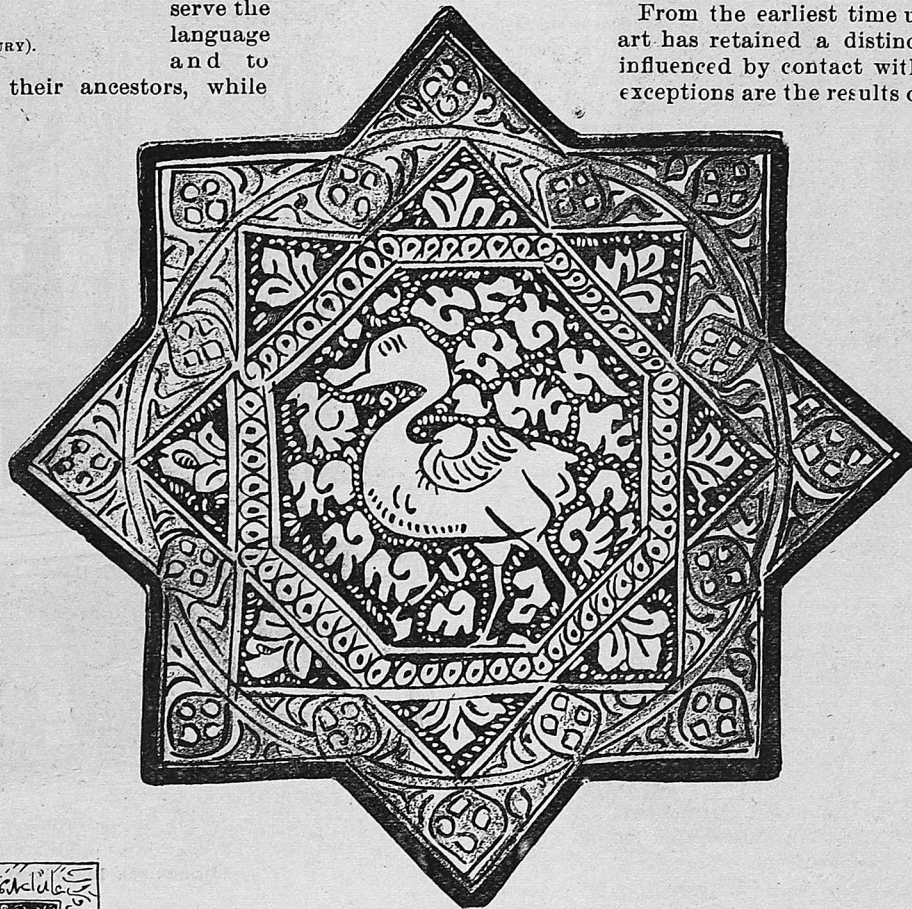
The successors and followers of Mahomed were after all but rude Bedouins, who gradually acquired culture from contact with the more refined countries which they overran. The powerful Abbaside Khalifs of Bagdad no doubt summoned to their court men of science and learning from all the countries under their sway; Persia furnishing them with architects and other artists. Skilled Persian workmen were no doubt employed in large numbers in decorating the mosques and palaces in the Arab capital, situated as it was on the very frontier of their own country. Thence we believe arose the so-called



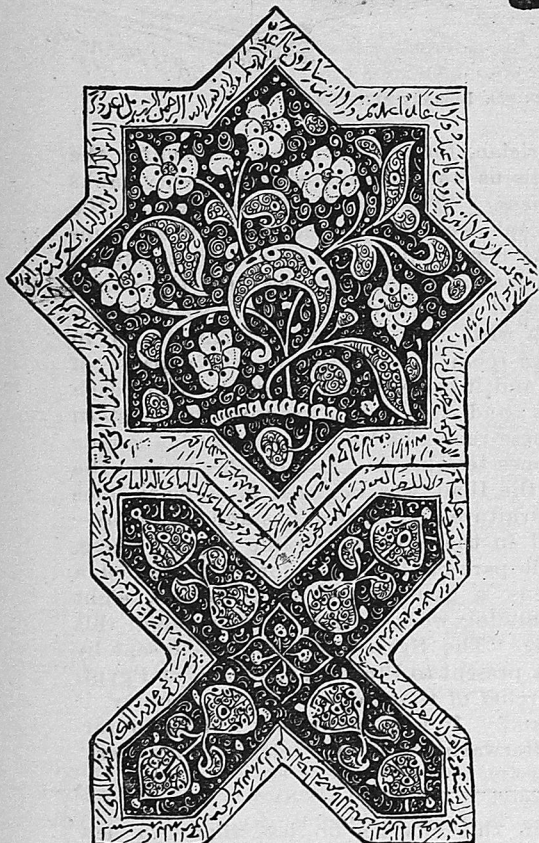
PERSIAN TILE (14TH CENTURY).



PERSIAN TILE (14TH CENTURY).



PERSIAN TILE (14TH CENTURY).



PERSIAN TILE (13TH CENTURY).

architecture and sculpture which can still be appreciated in the magnificent ruins of Persepolis, the style of which at once recalls the well-known sculptures from Nineveh. Probably nowhere else does a more splendid monument of former grandeur now exist. The Tomb of Cyrus, the ruins of Pasargadae, the Takht-i-Sulaiman, the Naksh-i-Rustam, and other remains show moreover that during the same period, the artistic skill of the Persians was not confined to Persepolis alone. The rock sculptures and ruins of Shapur (Sapor) A.D.



TILE (CENTER OF A PRAYER NICHE).

Arabian or Arabesque style of ornament, afterwards so widely spread and so well known. The peculiar pendant ornamentation of vaults and niches, of which the Alhambra is so typical an example, is identical in style with that used throughout Persia down to the present day; and specimens have been found in the ruins of Rhages, a city finally destroyed 600 years ago. Persia, always an artistic country, could hardly have borrowed it from her rude conquerors. The Arabs no doubt modified the art derived from the Persians, the modifications being much influenced by their intense hatred of anything approaching idolatry. The Persians however, even during the greatest religious fervor, never lost their taste for all kinds of ornament, including representations of actual natural objects. The Arabs themselves were probably never an artistic people, although many of their rulers were distinguished patrons and propagators of art and science. It is far from improbable that even the Alhambra itself



DESIGN FOR PORTIERE.—Trimmed with stripes of Gobelins, pleat and tassel embroidery. This elegant curtain is copied from a Swedish model and the embroidery is not difficult or laborious to work. The stuff used is smalt-blue cloth. The borders sewn on, are worked on yellowish-white and copper-colored woolen etamine with tapestry wool.

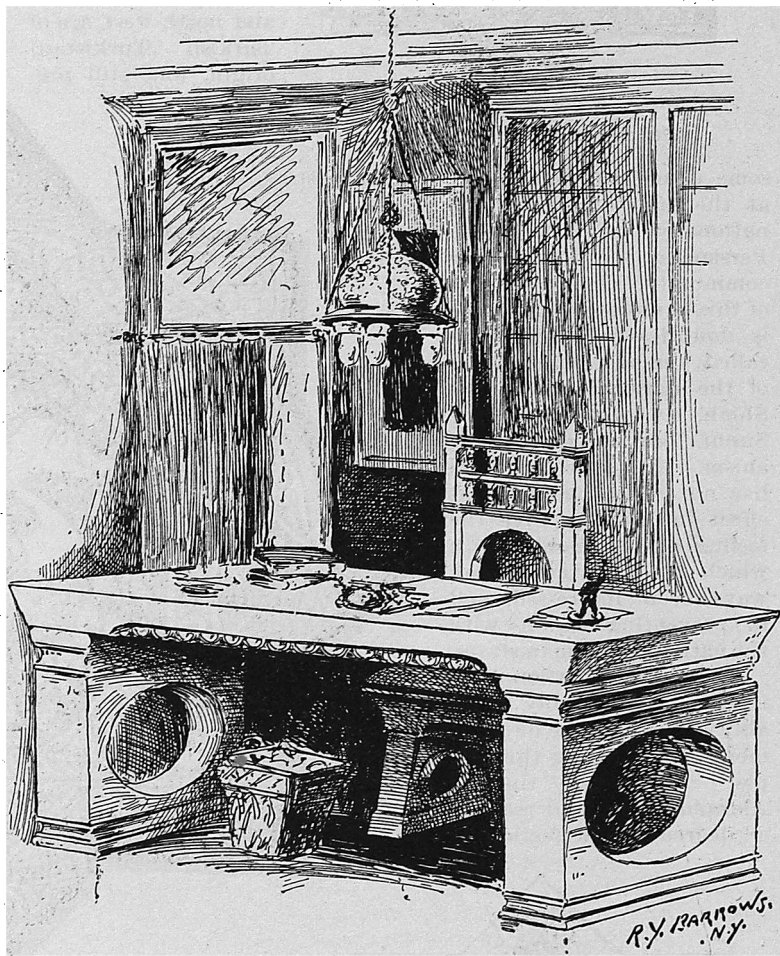
was chiefly the work of the Persians, who stood to the Arabs in much the same relation that the Greeks did to the Romans.

Unlike the Arabs the Persians have always been, and still are, artistic. After every great political convulsion art naturally declined, but only to rise in some new form as soon as the country had enjoyed a period of settled internal government and external peace.

The Turanian or Turkish element in the population, although politically and religiously amalgamated with the Persians, has however never imbibed the artistic idiosyncrasies of the latter. Works of art are almost exclusively confined to the parts of the country inhabited by the old Aryan stock; that is to say, to the center, south and east. The chief seats of the manufacture of textile fabrics have always been Kurdistan, Yezd and Kerman; of earthenware, Kashan, Nain and the neighborhood; of engraved copper work, Kashan; of painting, armor and engraved steel, and brass, Ispahan; of jewellery, wood, mosaic and enameling, Shiraz; and of wood carving, Abadeh.

ANCIENT MOSAIC WORK ON BOARD SHIP.

IN the time of luxury mosaic work became general in Greece. *Pavimenta* with elaborate pictures were composed of artistic tesserae—not as Furiati supposes of cubes of glass; and lavishness found in them ample and splendid means (as the specimens annexed to La Borde's *Italica* will help us to believe), of reconciling itself with false refinement. Athenæus, speaking of the gorgeousness of Demetrius Phalereus, Governor of the Athenian Republic in the third century before Christ, describes the richness of the pavings of his palace; and Galen tells us that Diogenes found an excuse for making a spittoon of a man who was courteously showing him over his house in the fact that it was impossible to find any place more dirty, seeing that the walls were adorned with superb pictures and the floors *parqueté* with precious imagery. But this sort of magnificence—which, according to Pliny (lib. xxxvi., c. 61) began through the Greeks to be in vogue with the Romans only about the time of Sylla—was carried to its utmost point in the ship of Hiero, the tyrant of Syracuse. Of this ship Maschion gives an account—known to us at second-hand through the “*Deipnosophist*.” After describing the building of the ship in its general parts, and the invention of a helix by



DESIGN FOR LIBRARY FURNITURE.

Archimedes, the geometrician, for the purpose of launching the vessel, the interior he tells us was constructed with twenty banks of oars and three entrances. “The lowest entrance led to the hold, to which the descent was by ten ladders of many steps each; and the next was contrived for those who wished to go down to the eating rooms; and the third was for the armed men. And on each side of the middle entrance were apartments for the men, each with four couches in them, thirty in number. And the supper-room for the sailors was capable of holding fifteen couches, and it had within it three chambers, each containing three couches; and the kitchen was towards the stern of the ship. And all these rooms had floors composed of mosaic work, of all kinds of stones tessalated. And on this mosaic the whole story (Mythos) of the *Iliad* was depicted in a marvellous manner. And all the furniture and the ceilings and the doors—everything, was executed in the same admirable way.” These, however, are but a small part of the ship; for it contained a temple to Venus, gardens, a gymnasium, an aquarium, eight towers, and engines of cunning workmanship. The name of this good vessel was originally “The Syracusan,” but when sent by Hiero to Alexandria as a present to Ptolemy, the King of Egypt, laden with corn for the relief of that famine-stricken country, it became “The Alexandrian.” It is thought that this ship furnished the idea of one afterwards built by Ptolemy Philopater.

One furniture house in this city has no less than 175 new designs in sideboards and buffets.